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BRUSSELS PASS USEU FOR AGMINCOUNSELOR  
STATE FOR OES; EUR/ERA; EEB/TPP/ABT/BTT (BOBO);  
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EU POSTS PASS TO AGRICULTURE AND ECON  
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SUBJECT: U.S. and French Corn Growers Discuss Biotech

REF : (A) 2007 PARIS 4170 ; (B) 2008 PARIS 1071 (C) 2008 PARIS 0011

¶1. (SBU) Summary: U.S. and French corn grower representatives met on March 17 to discuss biotech. French reps urged the U.S. team to encourage U.S. retaliation in the WTO case against the EU for its defacto moratorium on GMOs. The U.S. team expressed great concern about France's shift in biotech decision making from a science-based system to one emphasizing societal preferences and noted the need to combat this tendency, especially in Brussels. End Summary.

¶2. A high-level U.S. team representing the U.S. Grains Council (USGC) and National Corn Growers' Federation (NCGF) visited France on March 17 to discuss biotech with their French counterparts. Prior to the meeting, Ag M-C briefed team on the situation in France, including the national environmental review in 2007 (ref A) (which resulted in the dissolution of the previous, science-based competent authority) and the establishment of a socially-oriented biotech review process (ref B), which resulted in a ban on biotech corn cultivation in France. She also reviewed the results of the December 4 EU Environmental Council meeting, at which France received unanimous support for pushing for changes in the biotech decision-making process at the EU level (ref C). U.S. team expressed great concern about France's shift in biotech decision making and noted the need to combat this tendency, especially in Brussels.

¶3. (SBU) When the U.S. team asked their French counterparts (who are strong proponents of biotech cultivation and whose members' cultivation had reached 20,000 hectares before the ban) how they could support them, French reps replied that the U.S. should "make us pay" in the WTO biotech case. They encouraged retaliation on a product like Champagne that would bring high level pressure on the Sarkozy government. They also opined that the selection of Roquefort cheese in the beef hormone case was ineffectual and only strengthened the hand of Jose Bove and the foes of so-called industrialized agricultural imports.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: We are hearing this argument from French corn growers with increasing frequency. It likely reflects their calculation that domestic pro-biotech forces will remain too weak to push the government off its politically-popular anti-biotech stance. The Chairman of the National Assembly's Economic Commission told us recently he detected the beginning of a shift in public discourse on GMOs. But so far we see little evidence to support this.

